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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that in the search for authentic materials to use in adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) reading practice, local government Web sites offer rich potential. Municipal sites for U.S. counties, cities, and townships usually contain text written at a lower reading level than other general Web pages. This makes it possible for high beginning and low intermediate students to start accessing the Web in English, at the same time building reading confidence and making community connections. Local government Web sites are also ideally suited for lessons that dovetail into life skills, such as finding a job, health, and community living. The paper presents examples of lessons created for use with pages from the Arlington County, Virginia, Web site; background notes on creating lessons; a conceptual mode; and links to finding municipal Web sites. Annotated references are included. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.) (SM)

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Web-based Lessons Using Municipal Government Sites

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Summary

In the search for authentic materials to use in adult ESL reading practice, local government Internet web sites offer rich potential. Municipal sites – for U.S. counties, cities and townships – usually contain text written at a lower reading level than other general web pages. This makes it possible for high beginning and low intermediate students to be able to start accessing the Web in English, at the same time building reading confidence and making connections to the community outside the classroom door. Furthermore, local government web sites are ideally suited for lessons that dovetail into lifeskills, such as finding a job, health, and community.

What follows are examples of lessons created for use with pages from the Arlington County, Virginia, web site; background and notes on creating lessons; a conceptual model; useful links to find municipal web sites; and references.

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Internet Practice/Arlington Employment Center

Directions: Go to the Arlington Employment Center website at http://www.co.arlington.va.us/dhs/aec/index.htm. **Answer the questions with information from the website. Read for the important information! If some words are difficult, that's OK! Just find the important information.**

1) What is the address for the Arlington Employment Center (AEC)?

2) What is the phone number?

3) What year did the center begin?

4) Do the staff members (workers) speak only English? What other languages do they speak?

To answer the next questions, click on "Job Seeker Services" (left side of page)

5) What time is the employment office's Resource Center open?

6) How much does it cost to use the AEC to help find a job?

7) What kind of services are available at the employment office? (write only 3)

To answer the next questions, click on Resource Center

8) What job tests can you take at the center? (write only 2) What are the tests for?

9) What computer software can you use at the center?

10) Click on **Jobs (at the top of the page)** to look for "job openings" in Arlington County government. Select one job that is interesting for you. Write down the job title and salary and be prepared to tell the class about it.

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Arlington County, VA

Search Go

Human Services

See also:

- Map and Directions
- Alexandria/Arlington Workforce Investment Board Meeting Schedule
- Workforce Investment Act
- Employer Services
- Job Seeker Services
- New WIA Training Requirements
- Youth Employment
- Resource Center
- Other Economic Independence Services

Arlington County's Premier One Stop

Arlington Employment Center

3033 Wilson Blvd , 4th Floor
Arlington, VA 22201
703-228-1400
TTY 703-228-1498

The Arlington Employment Center was established in 1989 when the County consolidated employment and training programs under one roof for the convenience of our customers - the business community and the residents - who depend upon The Center to assist them in finding qualified employees and applicable jobs.

We administer federal, state and local employment and training programs which are designed to provide you with qualified employees. The candidates we refer to you are carefully screened and matched to your particular job requirements. The variety of educational and skill levels that we see every day at The Center varies from those with advanced degrees and many years of experience to those with limited education and work experience. Many candidates have attended job readiness and/or job search workshops presented by our professional employment specialists and job developers. All referrals are based on the qualifications of the individual referred without regard to race, age, disability, color, religion or national origin.

Our staff consists of employment professionals with more than 200 years of combined experience, in the public and private sector, in the fields of personnel placement and recruitment, job development, employment and training, and human resources. We are multilingual, and have staff who are fluent in the following languages: English, Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Amharic, and American Sign Language. Special aptitudes that we bring to our work are flexibility, compassion, and positive attitude and a belief that we are all here to do our very best for both employers and job seekers. We can and do make a difference.

We invite you to join us and the many employers in the Greater Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area who are currently participating in this public/private partnership that is a winning combination for all concerned.

"Helping you to achieve your staffing and employment goals."

[Top] [E-mail us] [Site Guide]

Revised: 10/06/2002 04:49:22
URL: http://www.co.arlington.va.us/dhs/aec/index.htm
E-mail: dhs@co.arlington.va.us
Arlington County Department of Human Services

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Arlington County Police Department

Proudly Serving the Citizens of Arlington County Since 1940

Services Provided

The Arlington County Police Department provides a variety of services, ranging from standard patrolling of the streets of Arlington to escorts of dignitaries from Arlington to the White House. Our first and main priority is to keep the people who live, work, and travel through Arlington County as safe as possible. Our sworn men, women and K-9 officers run radar to check for speeders, patrol residential neighborhoods to check on houses and make sure all is safe as possible, and respond to calls of distress, crime, accidents, lost persons, missing persons, malicious woundings, and homicides. We provide crime prevention tips so that residents of Arlington County don't become victims of crime. We provide extra checks of houses whose owners are out of town. We work with disadvantaged youth to make their lives better and their communities a better place to live. We provide services like bike registration and car safety seat checkpoints, and run sobriety checkpoints to try to keep drunk drivers from endangering drivers in Arlington County.

The Arlington County Police Department strives to improve the quality of life in Arlington by enforcing laws and establishing relationships with citizens through community-based policing. If you need to call the police about an emergency that is happening now, dial 9-1-1. Please call (703) 558-2222 (TTY 228-4610) for non-emergencies. Be sure to visit the Contact Us portion of this web site for a list of additional phone numbers.

The ACPD also offers crime prevention services, available by calling (703) 228-4330 (TTY users call 228-4610) or by completing this form and returning it to the address specified. This form may be used to request the following:

- Residential Premises Security Survey
- Commercial Premises Security Survey
- ~~Operator Arrest Location Information~~
- Neighborhood Watch Information
- Crime Prevention Literature
- Program Presentation to a Group

Customer Service Counter
1425 North Courthouse Road

- Bicycle Registration
- Citizen Accident Forms (pdf)
- Gun Registration

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Arlington County Police Department website

Read the ACPD website about "services provided." Answer the questions with information from the website.

1) What is the police department's main priority?

2) What kind of calls do they respond to?

3) What is the non-emergency telephone number for the police department?

4) What are sobriety checkpoints used for?

5) What can you do at the police Customer Service Counter?

Website: http://www.co.arlington.va.us/police/services.asp

On-line Arlington Library Card form

Fill out the form to get a library card. DON'T work "en español!"

1) Type your name.

2) If you have no email, leave it blank.

3) Fill out address and telephone number.

4) If you LOST your old library card, check the box to get a new one.

5) Read the "statement of responsibility" and check the box saying "I accept..."

6) Press "send."

7) The library will mail you a new card after several days!

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ABOUT
THE LIBRARY

Online Library Card Registration

En español

All information is confidential.

Children ages 5-13: Click here to print youth application.

Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

email Address

Street Address (Number) (Street) (Apt#)

City

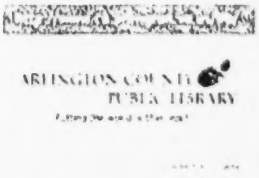
State VA

Zip Code

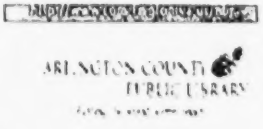
Contact Phone (e.g., 703-228-5990)

We offer two styles of library cards: standard wallet card and keychain tag. Choose one style.

Standard Style



Keychain Style



__ If you have lost your library card, you can apply for a new one. Check here if you want to reestablish a library account. (There is a $1 replacement fee for lost cards.)

Statement of Responsibility
I accept responsibility for all materials charged to this card with or without my consent. I am 14 years or older and agree to observe all library rules, promptly pay all charges, and notify the library of any changes to this information.

I understand that all library materials, including books, audiovisual items, electronic databases, and the Internet (World Wide Web) are available to all library users. I understand that I am responsible for my child's use of all library materials, including the Internet.

Library Internet Acceptable Use Policy

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Web-based Lessons Using Municipal Government Sites

Introduction

Many immigrants live in a culture of isolation. They often seek out linguistic havens where most residents speak their language and, unless they work in service jobs with American clientele, have limited contacts with the larger community. Adult ESL classes should strive not just to teach verb conjugations and clear pronunciation, but to bridge the gap between immigrant learner and community.

Authentic materials are a good way to help build that bridge and the Internet is a particularly rich storehouse of authentic language experience. I have been frustrated, however, when using the Internet to find that many web sites aimed at general American audiences are written at a reading level that is much too high for the average adult ESL student. Text on news sites such as CNN or the Washington Post poses too steep a reading challenge for beginning and most intermediate learners (SPL III and IV, NRS BeginningESL), especially those with little formal education in their native countries. It's the same with material from educational web sites, such as those affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution museums.

Local government web pages, however, offer a more accessible level of language, I have found. In addition, municipal web sites feature text with practical information on a variety of lifeskills topics that dovetail nicely into ESL lessons. Students often will have context into which they can put the material they are reading and will have greater incentive to decipher the text, since it contains

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information about the world right outside the classroom door. Finally, with a teacher to provide key vocabulary words ahead of time and simple comprehension questions to guide them through a municipal web page, ESL learners can practice language and get useful information about their communities at the same time. "Students experience the benefit of using English, not just studying it, and gain confidence in their English abilities." (Vorland, 2003)

Background

I teach in Arlington County, Virginia, across the river from Washington, D.C., with a diverse immigrant population anchored by Spanish speakers. My school, the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), runs intensive language classes of 15 hours a week for adult immigrants. I'm highly fortunate to have access, for about 90 minutes each week, to a staffed computer lab with more than two dozen Internet-connected work stations. I teach a 12-week class to low-intermediate learners, with an average attendance of 25 students.

Elements of Lessons

Local government web sites have the advantage of providing material on a range of important lifeskills: Finding a job, health information, transportation, some housing, and, of course, community topics, such as information on police/fire, libraries and recreation. The primary language practice available is reading, with some writing (especially completing forms). Speaking can be practiced in the context of follow-up activities where students work together to check answers.

I advocate contained lessons that can be completed in one class period. This works better, I find, with adult learners who may have uneven attendance patterns and low-level learners who don't take clear notes and thus have a more difficult time accurately remembering a project started in a previous class.

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Similarly, it's good to preset computers at the web page students will work from, rather than starting from the home page and expecting learners (who may have no Web experience) to navigate there, even with explicit directions.

Before starting to work at the computers, pre-teach key vocabulary. This will give beginning readers a boost and enable them to more easily grasp the main point of the text. For a lesson on finding low-income community health resources, the word "eligibility" was crucial. In a web page on police services, I pre-taught "sworn," "patrolling," "homicides" and "K-9."

The most important element of the lesson is the list of comprehension questions given to the students. I take the easy way out and give the students written copies of simple questions that guide them through the text. It's possible to preview the questions before going into the lab, especially with beginners. Students write answers down: either the basic information or complete sentences, depending on the level of learners. At the lowest reading level, students can find very basic information, such as addresses, telephone numbers or hours an office is open. For more advanced readers, they can be asked to find main ideas or details. The questions are important because they give students a focal point while reading the web page. Even if much of the text is difficult for them, most students can locate the information asked for in the question. It serves to give them confidence that it's possible to extract meaning from a text they might normally pass up as too challenging.

Many municipal web pages will have a limited number of links to other points of information. By carefully designing the assignment, you can get even novice Web users to start feeling comfortable about using links and hitting the back button. Through these basic navigation skills, students will gain confidence to do more complicated navigation tasks at a later date. It's advisable to have optional

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tasks – such as linking to the municipality's job listings – for students who already have good navigation skills and who might finish the main assignment quickly.

Processing the information after students have finished in the computer lab will give them the chance to review the answers and deepen their understanding. A whole class review is possible. It's also good to have pairs or small groups of students compare answers, possibly with an answer key. The teacher can be prepared to clarify confusing points or offer extra information that might not be readily apparent.

Finally, the advantage of using authentic information about local services is that, if the teacher wants to extend the lesson more, it's possible to do an out-of-class assignment: a trip to the library (after using on-line forms to obtain library cards), a visit to the job center (after reading about possible services and getting a schedule of hours), or an independent student assignment to visit a recreation center.

Conceptual Model

The following points should be considered when searching municipal web sites and designing lessons:

Lifeskills objective: How will you focus your exercise?

Language objective: Does the web page have a reading or writing component?

Municipal department: Where on the web site will you look for accessible pages?

View: Does the page present text in only one or two screens (to minimize need for scrolling?) Are there a minimum number of extraneous links, to forestall click-happy students from getting lost?

Language level: Is it appropriate for the general public (and not for internal municipal use – government memos are loaded with jargon, abbreviations and more complicated sentences). Is it appropriate for your students' reading level? Can key vocabulary be pre-taught?

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Content: Does the text have information useful to the learners' lives? Is it basic enough for low-level learners to find chunks of information they can recognize?
Questions: Can you write comprehension questions, anywhere from 3 to 10 questions (depending on level), to guide students through the text?
Follow-up: How will you process the information after leaving the computer lab?

Conclusion

ESL students without much formal education in their home countries often have little exposure to the Internet before coming into an English class. But those who have been introduced and start to feel comfortable with the Web have new avenues for communicating, both in their native language and in English. If we can give beginning learners some meaningful practice that aids them with experience and confidence in using the Web, it's a major service. If at the same time we can enhance their connections to the community, it's worth the time to create exercises.

In my experience, the pay-off for the teacher comes at the end of the lesson. I generally ask my students, "Was this practice good? Did it give you useful information?" and I'm usually pleased to get a strong "Yes" back from the class.

Links

My local government is Arlington County, Virginia (www.co.arlington.va.us) but I have perused a number of web sites for other municipalities, large and small, around the U.S. Many seem to have good possibilities for language practice.

If you don't know your local government site or are looking for a county, city or township nearby, try one of these links:

www.govengine.com
www.govengine.com (This is very complete.)

lcweb.loc.gov/global/state/stategov.html (Especially good for state government.)

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Annotated References:

Gaer, Susan and others; "Internet Treasure Hunts for ESL Students," iteslj.org/th/ These are not directly pertinent to lifeskills, but give a good example of simple questions to guide learners through text on a web site.

Morrison, Sally; "Creating Web-Based Language Learning Activities;" ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics; www.cal.ericcll/faqs/rgos/webcall.html She gives a good overview with many links to ERIC Digests, web sites and listservs.

Morrison, Sally (December 2002); "Interactive Language Learning on the Web." ERIC Digest. Not aimed at using authentic web sites, this digest gives ideas about how to create learning activities and place them on web sites. Nonetheless, it has some ideas applicable toward using authentic web sites for language practice. (ERIC Digests can be accessed via www.cal.org)

Silc, Kathleen Flannery (December 1998); "Using the World Wide Web with Adult ESL Learners." ERIC Digest. This gives a very good overview and especially has useful ideas about procedures to follow for a lesson.

South, Scott (2002); "EFL/ESL Lessons Using Web Sites," iteslj.org/t/ws/ This site has two dozen leveled lessons with worksheets to guide learners through exercises on websites such as jcpenney.com, bestbuy.com, monster.com and dell.com.

Vorland, Bruce (February 2003); "ESL Lessons Using Non-ESL Websites." iteslj.org/Lessons/Vorland-WebGuides.html He introduces four complete lessons focused on amazon.com, mapquest.com and other sites. The introduction has a very clear rationale for using the Internet as a source of authentic material for language practice.

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